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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Education International, International Federation of Journalists, International Trade Union Confederation, International Transport Workers' Federation, International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

Global Unions call for gender responsive public social protection systems, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure

Global Unions, representing 85 million women workers across the public, private and informal sectors, call for the realisation of gender responsive public social protection systems, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure for all women, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

This requires bold decisions to prioritise public policies and long-term public investments, including through tripartite consultations and negotiations, that will lift millions of women and girls out of poverty, towards a life of dignity and equality with income security and equal opportunities to access paid, decent and formal work - free from violence and harassment. Only concerted actions will reduce inequality and accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Platform of Action.

Key challenges

More than half of the global population is not covered by any type of social protection scheme, and less than 30 per cent enjoy comprehensive social protection. Due to the gender gaps in social protection systems, women experience lower coverage rates and substantially lower benefit levels, especially with regard to old-age pensions, unemployment benefits and maternity protection. Gender gaps are especially acute in old age: nearly 65 per cent of people above the retirement age living without a regular pension are women. These trends put women at a greater risk of poverty than men, across the life cycle. Privatisation of public services leads to a shift from formal work into informality, thereby widening the gender gaps in social protection and limiting women's access to quality public services. Individualisation and privatisation of social protection further compound the disadvantage.

In many countries, social protection schemes have been designed on the basis of a male breadwinner model, assuming an uninterrupted and full-time career in the formal economy. This does not match the reality in today's world of work, where women are underrepresented in the labour market and overrepresented in informal employment. This excludes women from most contribution-based schemes, leaving them unprotected in the absence of social protection floors.

The disproportionate share of unpaid care work done by women also affects their social protection entitlements. Globally, women undertake 76 per cent of all unpaid care work and do 3.2 times more care tasks than men. Women interrupt their careers, work shorter hours and remain trapped in precarious work, preventing them from accumulating sufficient contributions to social protection schemes.

A lack of quality, gender-responsive, affordable and accessible public services including transport, water and sanitation, energy, childcare and long-term care for dependent relatives exacerbates unequal distributions of care work to the detriment of women's labour market participation and social protection entitlements. In a majority of countries, the low quality of jobs in the care sector prevents these services from expanding sufficiently to meet demand.

Women are paid less compared to men for doing work of equal value, reducing their social protection contributions and benefit levels and exposing women to continued inequality and a greater risk of poverty. Not all women experience these challenges in the same way. For women with multiple and intersecting identities the

challenges are compounded. Gender-responsive solutions must necessarily apply an intersectional lens in order to address the specific needs of the most marginalised.

The way forward

Financing and increasing public investments in the care economy. Public early childhood education and care, and care services for other dependents, including the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities are effective in closing the gender gaps in pay, social protection and employment. ILO Convention 156 on workers with family responsibilities and Recommendation 165 stipulate that affordable childcare, home-help and home-care services should be promoted.

Facilitating the redistribution of care work through a gender-balanced use of paid family leave. Non-transferable fully paid leave for each parent promotes a faster return to the labour market by women after having children, to reduce employer discrimination against women, and to support improved career prospects and higher pay for women.

Adopting and enforcing ILO Convention 100 on equal remuneration and Convention 183 on maternity protection combined with policies that increase pay transparency and reduce vertical and horizontal sectoral occupational segregation; implementing strong intersectional and anti-discrimination legislation, including those for workers with family responsibilities, and ensuring minimum living wages all contribute to closing the gender pay and pensions gap.

Adopting and implementing policies that facilitate transition from the informal to the formal economy in line with ILO Recommendation 204. These include creating sustainable decent jobs, providing incentives to transition from informal to formal work, enforcing labour laws and workplace regulations, and in line with ILO Recommendation 202 on social protection floors, enabling informal workers to benefit equally from social protection systems.

Providing universal gender responsive access to essential public health care and basic income security at every stage of life, in line with Recommendation 202. Labour market policies should be combined with reforms of the social protection system to mitigate the disadvantages faced by women by ensuring adequate, public non-contributory social protection schemes, such as basic pensions and minimum unemployment benefits. Over 85 per cent of the countries in which there is no gender gap in effective pension coverage have non-contributory pensions, which are usually universal or pension-tested.

Periods of care should be fairly credited; contributions to pensions and other contributory social security schemes should continue to be paid even, for example, during parental leave.

ILO Convention 102 on social security sets out the right to survivors' benefits for the spouse of a deceased worker. The benefit levels of survivors' pensions must be adequate, as a relatively large number of women depend on these benefits.

Governments must secure fiscal space for necessary investment in gender responsive public social protection systems, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure by changing the rules and reversing the expansion of corporate power often through the use of tax incentives, public-private partnerships, tax evasion and trade agreements on public services. And by removing gender bias from macro-economic policymaking, including through recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work.

Governments must develop policies and measures that connect sustainable infrastructure, public services and social protection to maximise their effectiveness.

Expansion of public transport is vital to provide women with safe, equal access to public services including education, childcare and healthcare and to their place of work. Adequate public clean energy, sanitary and water facilities are imperative to quality care services and education and ameliorate key aspects of unpaid care work.

Social protection combined with quality public services provide income security and improve opportunities to access paid and decent work. If sustainable and effective solutions are to be found, women must be involved in policy decision-making and planning, and have access to adequate information on social and labour rights and protections. A significant gender gap exists in access to information and knowledge of rights and services. Public service and community broadcasting help reduce the gender gap and provide women with an important source of information, particularly on health and rights issues.

Recommendations

The Global Unions call on governments to take concerted action and prioritise, including through tripartite consultation and collective bargaining:

- Financing the development of, and public investment in gender responsive quality public services and sustainable infrastructure including through the creation and formalisation of jobs in the care sector, enhancing pay and conditions in the care sector, ensuring access to affordable and quality public transport, childcare and long term care, quality public education, from early childhood through further and higher education - and measures to prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Financing, establishing and strengthening adequate, inclusive and gender-responsive social protection systems, including social protection floors, basic pensions, survivors' benefits, paid parental leave, and paid leave for non-birthing parents that allows for an equal division of care responsibilities, and minimum unemployment benefits. Universal coverage must be ensured, including for women in precarious and informal work non-standard forms of employment. Periods of care must be credited fairly in social security contributions.
- Reforming and enforcing their laws in line with International Labour Organization Standards, including on: freedom of association (C87) and the right to organise and collective bargaining (C98), equal remuneration (C100), maternity protection (C183), discrimination (C111), social security (C102), workers with family responsibilities (C156), transitioning to the formal economy, (R204), social protection floors (R202) and by adopting an International Labour Organization Convention and Recommendation on violence and harassment in the world of work.

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Statement submitted by Federación Internacional de Fe y Alegría and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

Millions of girls and young women, especially those who are poor, migrants or refugees, have disabilities or belong to an ethnic minority, are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and physical and emotional violence. Education is key to ending this scourge, but it is not the only solution. The reality of inequality and violence against girls must be urgently addressed in a holistic manner.

Sexual or labour exploitation, genital mutilation and early marriage at a very young age are different types of violence that have a serious impact on the independence, self-esteem and health of girls. This form of injustice is one of the most persistent, systematic and widespread human rights violations. Violence against girls is rooted in the gender inequalities present in all social structures and its existence is a consequence of the discrimination they face.

Two factors come together to make girls vulnerable to violence: their gender (the fact of being female) and age (their stage of development as children or adolescents). These factors conditions and the harmful practices associated with them involve a risk of violence in a multitude of socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

The Federación Internacional Fe y Alegría and the Jesuit Refugee Service work with vulnerable populations in 41 countries around the world in the field of education as a human right and as the main tool for change. Through our work we support thousands of girls and young women who are victims of widespread violence just because they are female, meaning their rights are violated, their lives destroyed, their communities broken and their development halted.

Every day we see how certain discriminatory norms and the traditional and cultural practices of the communities and families with which we work give rise to inequality between girls and boys from the time of birth and lead to the abuse of girls. Traditional toxic roles that are replicated and that reproduce patriarchal environments and social patterns of conduct cause women and men to accept and develop attitudes and violent forms of behaviour as though they were natural.

We condemn the lack of institutional capacity to address this reality and we condemn the lack of mechanisms for reporting abuse and violence and protecting girls from them. Despite the existence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the fact that many countries have adopted legislation that, to varying degrees, protects children, the existence of a policy or legal framework does not necessarily equate to its implementation because there is not always the will or the means to enforce existing regulation. Furthermore, in most cases, girls and young women are unaware of their rights, are afraid of being stigmatized or are unsure of how to report cases of violence.

We sound the alarm at the increase in the number of girls and young women who have been forced to leave their homes fleeing conflict, violent extremism, natural disasters or humanitarian or other emergencies. The reality of forced displacement and a refugee existence makes them even more vulnerable, including to trafficking, exploitation and recruitment by armed groups.

Violence triggers a cycle of disadvantage for girls, affecting their current state of health and psychological and emotional well-being and the future development of their personality and abilities. Abuse, mistreatment and early pregnancy directly affect girls' education, by reducing their school attendance, participation and performance. Child marriage can be both a cause and a consequence of dropping out of school.

The Commission on the Status of Women has recognized and repeatedly and strongly condemned all forms of gender-based violence against the most vulnerable girls that persist around the world because they constitute barriers to the full achievement of gender equality and the genuine exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as the development of their full potential on an equal basis with boys and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, despite international commitments and the more than 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, real progress in the protection of girls and young women is inadequate and too slow. Girls are still invisible in international treaties and they are not recognized as having the right to special protection against gender-based violence, forced marriage or genital mutilation.

As educational organizations, Fe y Alegría and the Jesuit Refugee Service reiterate that the exercise of the right to quality, inclusive and equitable education is an essential element that contributes to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of girls, human rights, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

The most effective way to combat violence against girls is to change the social structures, attitudes and norms that underpin it. Only then will we be able to end acceptance of the abuse of girls, by transforming the current power relationship between men and women, boys and girls, into one of respect based on the recognition of equality and freedom of every human being.

Traditional gender roles that follow violent patterns are learned in the process of socialization and are transmitted from generation to generation. Schools, the main institution where socialization takes place, can reproduce and perpetuate this discrimination. Therefore, schools must be made into safe spaces for girls, where patterns of violence cannot take root in individuals.

Fe y Alegría and the Jesuit Refugee Service call for States, civil society and other actors concerned by the status of girls and young women to join efforts to transform schools into safe and protective spaces, for which there must be inclusive school infrastructure appropriate to the specific needs of girls and young women. It is also necessary, within the school community, to promote reflection, awareness and a critical review of the unequal gender norms that fuel violence. Schools must establish programmes to prevent, detect and respond to any instances of violence. Teaching staff must be trained in gender equality and in the prevention and detection of violence against girls.

In all areas, including school, we must work to adopt, review and guarantee the accelerated and effective implementation of laws that criminalize violence against women and girls, as well as comprehensive, multidisciplinary and gender-responsive preventive, protective and prosecutorial measures and services to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against girls in public and private spaces, as well as the harmful practices that affect the well-being and development of girls.

In parallel with this process, there is an urgent need to promote protection mechanisms, together with families and the educational community as a whole, as well as with other actors outside schools. In order to achieve the transition to an egalitarian model of society, individuals, organizations, schools and communities have an urgent duty to break the silence surrounding violence against girls and to ensure that girls have access to justice, as well as to develop, disseminate and learn about ways to protect and restore their rights.

It is also important to encourage the strengthening of institutions and the culture of democracy, thereby ensuring compliance with the law and ending impunity and the acceptance of violence.

We are concerned by the urgency of the situation. Although education is a precondition and essential requirement, it cannot by itself achieve a more egalitarian world in which all girls and young women can live in safety and dignity. That is why the reality of inequality and violence against girls must be addressed in a holistic manner. In that regard, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a framework to ensure that the rights of girls are protected and promoted. We must give priority to ensuring that girls have a life free of all kinds of violence, and this means that States must meet their commitments and urgently take the necessary measures to ensure equality and the right to education for all girls and to eradicate all forms of violence against them.

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Statement submitted by Afro-European Medical and Research Network, Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Foundation for GAIA, Graduate Women International (GWI), Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, International Alliance of Women, International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, Make Mothers Matter, Organisation pour la Communication en Afrique et de Promotion de la Cooperation Economique Internationale — OCAPROCE Internationale, Widows for Peace through Democracy and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

When paid work and unpaid care work is combined, women work more than men. Yet, women make up the majority of the world's poor — and most of them are mothers. Persistent gender inequality, which is rooted in gender norms, the division of assets, work and responsibilities, and the systematic devaluation of "women's work", adds to their vulnerability and perpetuates the feminization of poverty.

Social protection, whose main objectives are to reduce and prevent poverty, and to level off inequalities, is essential for women empowerment. In its most basic form, social protection includes the provision of essential health care, as well as income security along the life course — two pillars which are especially relevant to women in their role as mothers.

Universal health coverage and maternity protection is the cornerstone of a social protection system that works for women.

Health is the cornerstone of human development and a fundamental right. However, for half of the world's population, this basic need is far from satisfied, whether in developing countries, for lack of infrastructures, or in developed countries, for lack of access. Healthcare is especially crucial for women during pregnancy and around childbirth, both for the mother and the child. Universal health coverage must be achieved as a basic element of social protection.

Too many mothers still die today in relation to pregnancy. According to the World Health Organization, the global figure in 2015 was 216 deaths per 100,000 live births — with large disparities between regions. With the Sustainable Development Goals and target 3.1 United Nations Member States have committed to dividing this figure by three by 2030.

The example of the United States, where this mortality rate is increasing, shows the importance of social protection measures that have proven successful in many countries:

- Access to high-quality healthcare, including mental health, with antenatal visits for information and identification of high risk, as well as
- Maternity protection, including maternity leave an[illegible]e security.

Access to healthcare, especially in the first months of life is also essential to maximize the chances of survival and harmonious development of children. Social protection should go beyond essential healthcare in supporting parents, especially mothers in vulnerable situations, and ensuring that every child receives the nurturing care that will support their development to their full potential and make a difference for their future.

Healthcare infrastructure (including health centres and qualified health professional), which offers high quality maternal and child health services that are accessible for all, must be considered as one of the best investments a country can make, for both women empowerment and child development.

Beyond cash transfers: addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid family care work to empower women and lift them out of poverty.

Cash transfer is a proven social protection policy instrument to ensure income security along the life course. It is especially powerful when the beneficiaries are mothers: there is evidence from many studies that mothers typically spend their income on food, healthcare and the education for children, whereas men tend to spend a higher proportion of their income for personal needs.

However, reducing inequalities and poverty also requires addressing the root causes of women's particular vulnerabilities, beginning with their disproportionate share of unpaid family care work.

According to the International Labour Organisation, globally women perform 76.2 per cent of unpaid care work — that is the essential work and responsibility of maintaining the household and feeding and caring for family members. In poor rural households, women's work is also dominated by time-intensive activities such as water and firewood collection, as well as care of livestock and subsistence agriculture. All too often, women compensate through drudgery work the lack of basic infrastructure, water, and energy in particular. This large share of unpaid family care work results in women's "time poverty" and greatly limits their ability to perform other income-generating activities.

Addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid family care work should be part of any social protection policy that seeks to empower women. Therefore target 5.4 of the 2030 Agenda is also key for social protection, which should include policies to recognize, reduce and redistribute this work:

- The essential economic and social value of this work must be recognized by policymakers and society at large.
- Public Infrastructure and services investments must be directed at reducing women's time poverty and the time they spent on unpaid domestic chores and care work. Key infrastructure developments include clean energy, water and sanitation, but also transportation, mobile communication and information services, as well as diverse care services solutions; and as the first beneficiaries, women must be involved in their design and management.
- Unpaid family care work must be redistributed between men and women, but also between the family and the State and other actors in society.

Detailed recommendations along each of these "3 R" can be found on Make Mothers Matter's website.

In Conclusion

Social protection, the provision of public infrastructure and services and women empowerment are all intrinsically linked.

In particular, inter-linkages exist between the infrastructure and services that support the two pillars of social protection. Healthcare infrastructure and services also link to those same public infrastructure and services that also support the reduction of women's time poverty:

- Transportation (road and public transport) to facilitate access
- Clean water and sanitation as key elements of health, especially child health
- Clean energy for healthy cooking
- Internet and mobile communications for health information dissemination and e-health services.

Promoting women's participation in public life, in particular in local governments, is important ensure that women be involved in the design and management of both social protection policies and public infrastructure and services, so that they are tailored to their needs.

Social protection, supported by well-designed and functioning infrastructure and services, is essential to empower women, especially when they are in vulnerable

situations (notably single mothers, disabled women, mothers of disabled children, older women, widows, teenage mothers, etc.).

But women, especially mothers, are not only recipients of social protection: they produce and process food for the family; they are the primary educators of children and the first caregivers of dependent family members, including older persons; they actually provide basic health and care services, thus largely contributing to social protection. By raising the next generation of citizens and workers, they also support human development and contribute to building the future society and economy.

They must be recognized as powerful economic and social actors — who deserve to be better equipped and supported. Social protection is a human right that must be supported by universal public infrastructure and services. It must also be seen as an investment with high returns, especially when targeting the most vulnerable women and their children.

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Statement submitted by Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary — Loreto Generalate, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Inc. and Partnership for Global Justice, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

Gender-based discrimination threatens to undermine the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in real and measurable ways. Girls and women are critically disadvantaged in the world, and it is clear that there can be no sustainable development without gender equality. Social protection systems and infrastructure worldwide ignores and subordinates women and girls through their systemic structures. Women and girls need to be integrated and represented so that they are accounted for and their specific needs are met. Addressing these rising inequalities is an indispensable requirement in order to uphold the inherent and inalienable dignity of all human beings. The United Nations and member states must step up to their commitments and efforts to eliminate these inequalities that are exacerbating the gender gap, leaving girls and women vulnerable to exclusion from social protection systems, public services and extreme poverty. There must be a shift towards integral human development, a model that works towards combating inequality across social, political, and economic policies.

Women are disadvantaged, over represented and disproportionately affected within the context of each across each of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. Findings by the ILO World Social Protection Report show that:

- Only 35 per cent of children worldwide have access to social protection.
- Only 41 per cent of new mothers receive a maternity benefit.
- Women do 2.6 times the unpaid care and domestic work than men.
- The labour force participation rate among prime working-age women (aged 25–54) stands at 63 per cent of women compared to 94 per cent among their male counterparts.
- Up to 30 per cent of income inequality is due to inequality within households.
- The global gender pay gap is 23 per cent.
- 330 million women and girls live on less than USD1.90 a day, 4.4 million more than men.

In order to lift girls and women out of extreme poverty and work towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particular attention must be made to universal social protection and sustainable infrastructure so that no one is left behind. As the impacts of social protection programmes are not gender neutral, states must ensure that programmes address women's specific needs throughout the different phases of their lives, from childhood to old age. Programmes should factor in women's care role as well as the differences in access to services, infrastructure and productive work between men and women. Social protection programmes should take into account the double burden that unpaid care work and the responsibilities imposed by conditionalities place on women. They must be mindful of the heterogeneity of women's experiences and consider the intersectionality of gender, race and class, among other identity markers.

Implementing National Floors of Social Protection (ILO Recommendation 202) is an essential, action-oriented policy that ensures governments uphold their primary responsibility to provide basic social protection to their citizens. In order to be sustainable, these social protection services must be universal, and inclusive of women and girls, ensuring the fulfilment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights. Access to health care, education and basic income security is essential in lifting this group up below the poverty line.

Women need to be included in political arenas so these specific needs are not overlooked and ignored when it comes to these social protection policies. Reforms to social protection systems can mitigate the disadvantage women and girls face in accessing social protection and help to expand coverage to those that are left out. We must prioritize these social protection policies for women and girls and pledge to implement them in order to ensure the dignity of all persons.

To achieve social inclusion, increased effectiveness of fiscal policies is pivotal. Within developing countries, an effective and reformed taxation system can ensure that fiscal policies are focused on implementing basic social services such as healthcare, education and wage benefits in order to cater to those most disadvantaged.

Research shows that Social Protection Floors for all are financially and fiscally possible in most countries. What is required for their successful implementation is the political will of developing countries to allocate resources within the budget. As outlined in the 2018 Financing the End of Extreme Poverty report, developed countries receive ten times more aid per person than those in less developed countries. Donor states need to commit to redistributing their aid and funding, targeting it to those countries that need it most so that girls are women are empowered and protected, not left behind.

To ensure all member states have the resources to implement International Labour Organization Recommendation 202, reform of the current financial system is critical. The present system is exacerbating gender inequalities and threatening social inclusion.

Social protection programmes must include accountability and transparency mechanisms that are accessible women and girls. Such mechanisms must pay attention to gendered power differences which may discourage women from voicing their concerns or lodging complaints, and will ensure efficiently while avoiding corruption and further exclusion of this group. This will ensure strong and more involved state-society relationships develop, allowing women and girls to be involved and voice specific social issues that are forcing them to be pushed below the poverty margin and excluded from social protection and society.

We recommend the following strategies:

- States must empower girls and women through implementation of national floors of social protection in line with International Labour Organization R.202, that recognize their specific needs, including basic pensions and minimum unemployment benefits, with universal coverage for women in precarious and informal work.
- States must commit to allocating the necessary resources in national budgets to ensure women and girls have equal access to social protection systems.
- States must commit to implementing infrastructure that is sensitive to the specific needs of women and girls in its design.
- Reform the present financial architecture to reduce inequalities of women and girls and put the dignity and life of people before corporate benefits.
- Empowerment of girls and women through participation in the creation and legislation within political arenas.
- Ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of social protection and the resources committed.

Leaving no one behind means the benefits of sustainable development must reach everyone. We foresee that these strategies would be efficient and effective in tackling the growing inequalities between men, women and girls. We must work

together at a global level strategically and intelligently to strive for universal justice so that social inclusion barriers are eliminated from society and equality is achieved for women and girls.

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Statement submitted by Casa Generalizia della Societa' del Sacro Cuore, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of the Mission, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, Fondazione Proclade Internazionale — Onlus, International Presentation Association, Partnership for Global Justice, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Sisters of Charity Federation, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries and UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Social Protection Systems for Indigenous Women and Girls:

Rural- and Urban-Specific, Inclusive Delivery Systems

The ethnic and gender identities of indigenous women and girls intersect to heighten their need of the social protection of their physical, educational, and socioeconomic well-being. Indigenous people around the world are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty and extreme poverty. (World Bank, 2011) As child-bearers and primary care-takers in most indigenous households, women and girls are disproportionately burdened by poverty's signature resource and opportunity deficiencies. In accordance with traditional gender roles, women and girls will take on additional unpaid labour and make personal sacrifices of food, water, sleep, recreation, paid employment, and education to make up for these deficits. They also face heightened risks of physical and emotional abuse within their families and gender-based legal obstacles to financial inclusion and property ownership. (United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2009)

Inadequate collection and disaggregation of data on indigenous peoples continues to hinder public response to the grossest violations of their human rights (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Inclusive Social Development of Indigenous Peoples). Nevertheless, the International Labour Organization asserts that it is safe to assume that indigenous peoples comprise a large proportion of the 5.2 billion people with little or no social protection coverage. Even in nations in which governments support social protection floors aimed at the assurance of a minimum standard of living for all, there remain substantial gaps. For example, historic and ongoing cultural discrimination and exploitation of indigenous people and land have rendered significant linguistic, infrastructural, and socially exclusionary barriers to their enjoyment of state-sponsored protections for health, especially in childhood and maternity; nutrition; water; income support; education for children; and safe, dignified employment opportunities. (ILO, 2017)

Poverty experienced by indigenous people is not simply a function of their communities' historical rurality. Today, just under half of indigenous Latin Americans live in urban areas. While indigenous people in urban settings have significantly greater access to basic services, education, healthcare, and formal employment than their rural indigenous counterparts, their access continues to lag significantly behind their non-indigenous, urban counterparts. City-dwelling indigenous peoples must also contend with losses of the "social safety nets" and traditional land tenure systems that would be available to them in rural settings. (World Bank, 2015)

The following practices demonstrate the efficacy of social protection programs to improve indigenous women and girls' access to their rights if scaled up, properly resourced, and implemented with the guidance of indigenous women and girls themselves:

- Marikudo Ati Community Association (MACA) and the Amontay–Santol Livelihood Association (ASLA)'s women-led community programs amplify the benefits of the Philippines' national Department of Social Work and Development's Modified Conditional Cash Transfer Program for Indigenous Peoples, Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) through:

- Marikudo Ati Community Association's School of Living Tradition in Marikudo Ati Tribe, which offers sessions from cultural masters on Inati language, dance, Rara (weaving) and performing arts as well as culture-based entrepreneurship programs that help women and girls, including those with disabilities, earn additional income for their families
- Amontay–Santol Livelihood Association's training for women in product development and management, which builds upon a weaving training offered by the Department of Trade and Industry and Stainable Livelihood Program by allowing participants to augment their family income through the sale of their craftwork

- India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (now merged with its National Mission for Green India) compensates indigenous communities for contributions to soil conservation, irrigation provisioning and improvement, water harvesting and conservation
- Horn Relief and UNICEF's Pastoral Youth Leadership and Camel Caravan Pastoral Community Survey projects in Somalia provided older nomadic youth with a basic education through a locally developed curriculum. Participants (over half of whom were girls) were empowered to raise awareness within their communities of good practices in human health, animal husbandry, natural resource management, and leadership and governance. (Downie, 2011)
- Chadian Ministries of Health and of Livestock Production, Chadian nomadic communities, and the Swiss Tropical Institute's joint human and livestock vaccination campaigns combined vaccination of women and children with compulsory livestock vaccination measures on which pastoralist livelihoods depend. (Schelling et al., 2007)
- Canada's National Inquiries on Truth and Reconciliation and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and recent effort to instate an Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Prospera program in Mexico (formerly Oportunidades Programme of Mexico) provides conditional cash transfers with doctor visit and school attendance conditions in order to improve the nutrition in beneficiary households (Food and Nutrition Security Platform,2018)
- Paraguay's ComVoMujer Programme held dialogues for analysis of the main causes of violence against indigenous women from an intercultural and gender perspective. It proposed preventive community strategies towards ending this violence against indigenous women and a declaration that was presented to the Ministry of Women and the Instituto Paraguayo del Indigena, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the 59th Commission on the Status of Women (TEKOHA, 2015)

The following documents serve as guidelines and supporting frameworks for action to improve social protection for indigenous women and girls:

- ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, No. 169 (1989)
- ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, No. 202 (2012)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Beijing +5 Political Declaration and Outcome

- Food and Agriculture Organization's Respecting free, prior, and informed consent (2014)

The following recommendations are offered to Member States:

- Ratify and implement ILO Convention No. 169 and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Tailor social protection delivery systems to reach indigenous women and girls, including those with disabilities, living within cities as well as those in rural areas, including by:
  - Investing in existing indigenous, women led — organizations and community support programs that promote gender equality and girls' leadership
  - Allowing flexibility for individual indigenous communities to negotiate terms of programs and to elect to participate, ensuring inclusion of women in local negotiations
  - Developing and supporting programs and market access points for the professionalization of traditional craft, agriculture, and linguistic skills, taking into account the differences between urban and rural markets for such skills and training women in each setting accordingly
  - Avoiding rigid conditionalities among social protection benefits by offering increased benefits for those in most remote areas and in deepest poverty to counterbalance the increased cost and time burdens for these populations to meet any specified conditions
  - Launching multilingual campaigns to raise awareness of social protection offerings and procedures
  - Integrating indigenous "mother tongue curricula" featuring indigenous histories, traditional knowledge and spiritual values, and bilingual or multilingual teachers (including indigenous female teachers) into public education systems
  - Ensuring programs are well-resourced, staffed by culturally informed and sensitive individuals, and linked to long-term opportunities for upward mobility
- Apply both indigenous and gender lenses:
  - to disaggregated data collection and analysis, so as to describe the distinct experiences of indigenous women and girls
  - to Sustainable Development Goal implementation projects (especially for Target 1.3, Goals 1-8/13-15), assessing not only availability of services in the evaluation process, but also their accessibility and cultural acceptability to indigenous women and girls
- Integrate biodiversity conservation and indigenous social protection projects in recognition of their symbiotic relationship for indigenous communities and mutually reinforcing benefit for all of society
- Employ indigenous women in program design, implementation, and evaluation for the achievement of all the above

This statement is submitted jointly by following Economic and Social Council-accredited organizations, all of whom are members of the Justice Coalition of Religious."

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Statement submitted by Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

Mountain women and mountain targets have to be in the focus of 2030 Development Agenda

The delegation of Utah Valley University to the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women would like to thank the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce for allowing us to contribute to the priority theme of this year's forum: social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. These issues are crucial for sustainable development of communities, families, women and girls in mountain areas.

At this forum last year, we emphasized that mountain women and families are among the poorest and most disadvantaged worldwide and at extreme risk of neglect by the international community. A study, "Mapping the vulnerability of mountain peoples to food insecurity," done by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations jointly with the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, a coordinator of sustainable mountain development agenda globally, found out that 39 per cent of developing countries' mountain populations, including women — 50 per cent in rural areas — is vulnerable to food insecurity, and that during 2000–2012, 30 per cent more mountain people suffered from food insecurity. Climate change, lack of access to education and jobs, and political turmoil to name a few further place mountain communities and women in dire circumstances.

The United Nations designated three mountain targets as an important tool for implementing the 2030 Development Agenda in mountain areas: Target 6.6: by 2020, protect and restore water related ecosystems, including mountains; Target 15.1: by 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular, mountains and drylands; Target 15.4: by 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development.

By participating at two United Nations forums on implementing different Sustainable Development Goals during 2018, members of the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University, found out a lack of reliable mechanisms that would integrate mountain targets into those forums' final documents. This further marginalized the mountain communities globally and disenfranchised their right for sustainable development

During the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, they co-hosted, through the engaged learning initiative, a side event, "Advocating for rural and mountain women globally through student engaged learning;" a parallel event, "Education for sustainable development to empower rural and mountain women," and advocated for mountain women through the written statement sponsored by a group of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. In addition, they were able to integrate multiple times language about mountain women in the Working Draft of recommendations from non-governmental organizations to Zero Draft Document of the Commission. Unfortunately, proposed language has been removed from the final document during the negotiations by state representatives. They did it in a non-transparent way during closed sessions, which demonstrated a marginal role of civil society in decision-making at the United Nations and, as a result, the neglect of the mountain targets as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Similarly, during the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018, Utah Valley University students advocated for the implementation of mountain targets as an important step to bring mountain communities in the focus of the 2030 Development agenda. They did that by making an oral statement during general debates and through the written statement and thus contributed to the efforts of the Mountain Partnership, which co-hosted with the Government of Andorra a side-event titled "Mountains and the 2030 Agenda." The forum provided an important opportunity for them and other civil society groups and member states to do so because six Sustainabie Development Goals under its review contained three mountain targets. At the same time, none out of the 47 nations submitting Voluntary National Reviews at the forum, including the 14 states - members of the Mountain Partnership, mentioned mountain targets in their official statements. As a result, the Ministerial declaration of the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development, never mentioned the mountain targets at all.

The student engaged learning model of Utah Valley University has proven its success for students' professional growth, international recognition and for the advocacy of mountain women and sustainable mountain development agenda of the United Nations since 2011. Academic institutions elsewhere could provide similar benefits for their students by adopting it. However, their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda cannot be successful if they will not be able to bring real changes to the mountain communities, families, women and girls worldwide.

We would like to urge the United Nations to make changes in the process of reviewing implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by member states during relevant forums of the Economic and Social Council. It needs to have an oversight mechanism ensuring that implementation of all targets affiliated with goals under considerations are included in the Voluntary National Reviews and in the final documents. In addition, the process of adoption of final documents of the forums has to be transparent, allowing for civil society and all interested parties to watch debates of the member states' representatives on that matter.

This needs to be done urgently, in order to improve the procedure of review of Sustainable Development Goals' implementation by nation states and make them a part of the 2019 forums of the Economic and Social Council. This will ensure then also that this forum will include in its final document a proper language about social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment — in particular of mountain women, girls, their families and communities.

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Statement submitted by International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Netherlands Association of Women's Interests, Women's Work and Equal Citizenship, Soroptimist International, Soroptimist International of Europe and Women for Water Partnership, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

Access to Water and Sanitation are key for Women Emancipation and Development in General

Despite the commitment of member states to targets 6.1 and 6.2 (universal access to water and sanitation) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)/Agenda 2030 and recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women 60 agreed conclusions, according to the United Nations Water synthesis report these targets are seriously lacking behind and will not be met at current "speed" (United Nations Water synthesis report 2018).

Access to and equal management of water and sanitation (and as a minimum access to basic, public, services on Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are prerequisites for women's development and empowerment. The water-related labour market, financial independence, education and good health are all unlocked by access to water and sanitation.

Women play a pivotal role in water management. Although this principle has been part of the legacy of and policy on water since 1992 (Dublin principles, 1992), the implementation needs a real boost. Acknowledging women's traditional and modern roles in water management and governance can help unlock women's potential in achieving Sustainable Development Goals six (water and sanitation) and five (equality and empowerment) and the wider 2030 Agenda. To reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets it is imperative to ensure and enhance women's professional and voluntary roles and involvement in water.

Current reports show, there will be a huge lack of trained professionals to ensure the water-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals; one of the reasons is that women have not enough access to relevant education or jobs/hired in these fields (International Water Association, 2014).

It should be emphasized that pursuant to the human rights to water and sanitation, countries have an obligation to progressively provide safe drinking water and adequate sanitation services, including in the workplace. Countries also have the obligation to guarantee that the right to water is enjoyed without discrimination and equally between men and women. Meeting this obligation will remove one of the major hurdles to girls and adult women having the opportunity to go to school, obtain the appropriate education and training, and hold positions in the workplace, further adding to the economies' skilled human resource capacity. Clean, safe and readily (uninterrupted) available water in medical posts, homes, schools, workplaces and training institutions is therefore another prerequisite to a healthy economy (edited from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011a). As such, investing in water is a winning proposition from economic, environmental and social standpoints.

In many countries, droughts, floods and deforestation increase the risks for women and girls by itself and because of lack of information, persistent cultural roles, etc. Loss of housing, livelihoods and even death are impacting women and girls more than men, because they are left behind including by lack of coping mechanisms due to cultural restraints.

It (also again) increases unpaid time girls and women spend to retrieve water for household chores and small-scale farming e.g., leaving them less time for education or earning an income (International Labour Organization, 2013a; United Nations Development Programme, 2014). Lack of coping mechanisms leads to

exponential increase of female-headed/one parent households and internal displacement.

Supporting women, give them a say at the table to decide on policies and measures to prevent disasters, build their resilience are crucial elements to prevent death and destruction as a result of natural disasters.

A lot of investment in water-related infrastructure turns out to be dysfunctional after a very short period of time. One of the main reasons is the lack of maintenance and management due to lack of structural funding and capacity (and not tapping into the competences of local women). To make infrastructure sustainable (affordable, appropriate, accessible), women need to be involved in the design and decision-making and be enabled to play a (professional, paid) role in the upkeep of the infrastructure (e.g. multiple reports from the World Bank).

Large infrastructure and building of dams e.g. for hydropower and/or irrigation often lead to displacement of local populations and hence to obviously problems for women and their families. Even if new jobs are created, they are often not suitable to replace loss of income and livelihoods requiring different skill-sets. The use of tools like the Hydropower sustainability assessment protocol can lead to different decisions and designs.

Women for Water Partnership urges you to:

- Follow-up on the recommendations of the special rapporteur on the gender aspects of human rights to water and sanitation.
- Follow-up on the recommendations of the World Water Development report 2016: A number of measures can be undertaken to improve women's participation in, and contribution to the water-related workforce, including: adopting equal opportunity policies and measures; improving sex-disaggregated workforce data sets; addressing cultural barriers, social norms and gender stereotypes; and expanding access to public services and investment in time - and labour saving infrastructure (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization — World Water Assessment Programme, World Water Development Report 2016)
- Acknowledge women's traditional and modern roles to unlock women's potential in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 5 combined and the wider 2030 Agenda. To reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets it is imperative to ensure and enhance women's professional and voluntary roles and involvement in "water"
- Invest in vocational education/training for women (in non-traditional occupations) to ensure they can obtain jobs in also managing and maintaining water-related infrastructure and better managing water use in many occupations such as agriculture, health care, etc.
- Adapt human resource policies together with business and other organizations to enhance the gender balance in the workplace at all levels
- Promote the use of the Hydropower Sustainable Assessment protocol to ensure social impacts are taken into account
- Promote the adoption of the Women Empowerment principles.
- Agree to a dedicated World Water Day on water and women that can help to unlock this major, persisting issue.

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Statement submitted by Federation for Women and Family Planning, Union Women's Center, Women and Modern World, Social Charitable Centre and Women's Rights Center, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

Federation for Women and Family Planning from Poland, Union Women's Center from Georgia, "Women and Modern World" Social Charitable Center from Azerbaijan and Women's Rights Center from Armenia are Economic and Social Council accredited organisations working in the field of women's rights in Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and operate on national, regional and international level.

We welcome the focus and the theme of the 63rd Commission of the Status of Women on gender equality and the social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure. In particular, we would like to draw the Commission's attention to fulfilling the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women and girls, as a crucial component of their empowerment through inclusive social protection systems and ensuring access to reproductive and sexual health services in the public health sector.

Sexual and reproductive rights are critical healthcare issues but are also essential, as United Nations experts have made clear in the past, to enable women to access their economic, social and cultural rights in equality.

Women's experiences in various communities are very diverse, as is the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Yet there are common threads among women's issues—women continue to be most affected by cultural, social and patriarchal norms that have become institutionalized. Women and girls face inequities and inequalities – these are based on gender, however as an intersectional approach would show, aspects such as race, disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity and other social categories shape the experience of discrimination that is more often a norm than an occurrence. Women's autonomy is being questioned and most often their access to public services is denied by means of numerous obstacles. The main barriers involve both controlling women's sexuality and undermining women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. If women and girls do not have the right and access to make decisions on their own body and their sexuality, they can be further pushed not only into poverty with unwanted pregnancies but also suffer poor health outcomes. A fundamental aspect of this is a disastrous impact on their health, well-being, education, social status, as well as opportunities for personal and vocational development.

At some point in life women can be exposed to risks that can drastically alter their social and economic standards of living – a strong and inclusive social protection system can ensure that women and girls get the support they really need and the services they are entitled to. Accessing safe abortions is a matter of human rights, social justice, bodily autonomy and a basic health concern. In countries where abortion is illegal, criminalized, or not effectively accessible, women resort to clandestine procedures which can lead to complications and detrimental health consequences. Regardless of noted progress in abortion-related legislation across the world, significant barriers in accessing abortion remain, let alone the widespread stigma and discrimination. Recent developments in Central and Eastern Europe have put reproductive rights of women and girls under severe pressure and once again is has become clear that these rights must often be fought for, upheld and secured. Despite the historical aspects and the context of Central and Eastern Europe, in numerous countries of the region, women's bodies have become a symbol of national heritage and an issue of national dispute in the context of religious and medical ethics, not that of human rights and bodily autonomy.

Abortions take place every day in spite of existing barriers. The lack of abortion providers and common misuses of conscientious objection by individual doctors but

also entire hospitals and even pharmacies mean no access to abortion services in entire cities and/or regions. This practice forces women to travel sometimes very far distances to obtain the service, which can be additionally hampered by mandatory waiting periods, financial barriers and biased counselling.

There are no laws or punishments that will prevent women from terminating their pregnancies, what contemporary Poland and Ceausescu's Romania are a perfect example of. Moreover, abortion being legal on paper is not enough – it must be truly accessible, especially to those most vulnerable –people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, young women. Moreover, all women, including women with disabilities, must be protected against forced contraception or sterilization against their will or without their informed consent. Full access to sexual and reproductive health services, considering the special needs of diverse groups, must become part of both social protection systems and the public health agenda. It must also be supported by a strong and sustainable infrastructure.

We call on the United Nations and its Members States to truly commit to women's rights and respect, protect and fulfil the right to access safe and legal abortion services and post-abortion care.

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Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of University Women, Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Graduate Women International (GWI), Make Mothers Matter, Mothers Legacy Project, Soka Gakkai International, Soroptimist International, Women Graduates — USA, Inc. and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Graduate Women International (GWI) and the above-mentioned non-governmental organisations present the following statement addressing the 63rd session Commission on the Status of Women 63 priority theme.

Gender equality is the right of all women and girls and is central to the accomplishment of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The empowerment of women and girls is a pre-requisite for gender equality. Empowerment is a process that requires that the combination of social protections, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure support be provided to women and girls when it is most needed and has the potential to synergistically advance their academic, social and economic status.

This process is most productive when it is recognizes that women and girls are not a monolithic group and that geography, history, culture, custom, age and other determining factors define groups of women and girls and that intersecting traits further differentiate within groups. And, that groups and subgroups are subject to their own unique vulnerabilities.

Therefore, Graduate Women International (GWI) calls for the assessment of the extent and nature of these vulnerabilities within groups and subgroups of women and girls so social protections, public services and infrastructure can be provided to specifically target these vulnerabilities and in targeting them, eliminate obstacles to women's and girls' rights to economic and social inclusion.

Social protections must have two basic goals: to prevent and to protect from economic deprivation.

Protections are typically government or private initiatives. As things stand, in most countries, existing social protections, if they are even offered, are woefully inadequate at preventing or protecting from economic deprivation.

We believe that governments have an obligation to the fulfilment of the two goals as they apply to their most vulnerable citizens, specifically women and girls.

To protect against and prevent economic deprivation, where vulnerabilities exist, Graduate Women International (GWI) believes that social protections must cover all of women's and girls' day-to-day basic financial needs, including food, water, clothing, decent shelter, menstrual hygiene needs, education and personal safety. For the very large number of women working in the informal economies of the world who are not protected against unexpected losses of income, Graduate Women International (GWI) believes that governments must provide insurance that can be recouped by women and girls in the event of natural and man-made disasters, crop failures, theft of possessions, non-payment by employers for services already rendered, national recessions and death that results in loss of household income.

Regarding cash transfers to women and girls, governments must work with social services and non-governmental organisations to ensure the personal safety of women and girls at the hands of their male relatives and other powerful family members who may use verbal and physical abuse to appropriate the cash.

Social protections must keep up with increases in the cost of living based on an acceptable standard of living that includes food, housing, education, transportation, healthcare and taxes.

On an as-needed basis social protections must expand to insulate the most vulnerable women and girls against the shocks of national and global economic crises

because women and girls suffer disproportionately more than men during these times and are more likely to become impoverished.

In addition to government initiatives and programs, Graduate Women International (GWI) calls upon all private sector companies to provide women-centric, employment- related protections. We encourage all private sector companies to view these protections as investments made in their "enlightened self-interest" because companies that strive for substantial gende- equality are generally speaking more successful than those that do not. Gender equality in the workplace is a function of a harassment-free settings, equal pay for equal work and gender-blind systems of upward mobility within the company. Gender equality also requires a commitment to women employees to provide benefits that consider the traditional nature of their household responsibilities. Maternity leave, child-delivery medical coverage, childcare and flexible working hours are go a very long way in ensuring that qualified women employees do not lag behind their male counterparts in pay, upward mobility and choice work assignments.

Equitable and gender responsive access to public services are central to guaranteeing opportunities for women and girls to live fulfilling and productive lives. Yet, historically, gendered barriers to public goods and services have gravely hampered women's academic and economic progress and social inclusion.

By and large, public services, have not been known for their economies of scale or their efficiencies. However, in the age of free markets, they have become scarce beca.se public sectors have been trimmed back as a requirement of structural adjustment programs. Cutbacks in city and central government services that, in many cases sustain life itself, have led to the severe degradation of women's and girls' lives.

An inherent goal in the process of empowerment of women and girls, is to make them independent from societal forces that control their bodies, minds and environments. This goal is achieved through a number of steps that women and girls must be encouraged to take. Availing themselves of services like free housing, healthcare, schools, colleges, vocational training, libraries, legal services, law enforcement and criminal justice systems, financial advice and services, favourable banking terms and conditions, transportation, childcare and social services is an indispensable interim foothold step that women and girls must be able to rely upon as they move from total dependence on others to independence.

Given the importance of the role that public services play in the process of empowerment, Graduate Women International () calls on Member States to reconsider the mass privatization of public services that has been underway during the last three decades. While privatization may have led to efficiencies that did not exist before, it has also had the effect of commoditizing services and pricing them beyond the reach of the people who need them the most. By and large, any benefits emanating from privatization have been captured by the private sector and the governments themselves and has exacerbated the economic and social exclusion of women and girls.

Infrastructure can be a powerful driver of gender quality when urban and rural planning incorporates the intention of creating gender equality. Men and women differ in infrastructure requirements. The three requirements of infrastructure identified by urban and rural women as opposed to men are personal safety in public places, logistical efficiencies and a clean environment.

It is the responsibility of governments to ensure that infrastructure planning and implementation take into consideration these expressed needs and vulnerabilities. Personal safety, the efficient pursuit of personal and professional fulfilment and an environment that promotes rather than damages health are the basic rights of all

women and girls and roads, highways, electricity and telecommunications grids, mass transportation, water, sewage and garbage disposable systems, parks and recreation, law enforcement and safety stations and environmental conservation must support the fulfilment of these rights.

The inclusion of women in infrastructure planning and implementation in some towns and villages has resulted in an increase in women's participation in paid work outside the home, social interactions and interest in learning and recreational activities as well as girls' attendance in schools and extra-curricular activities.

Therefore, Graduate Women International (GWI) calls for all governments to stipulate, in all contracts to develop infrastructure, that women's perspectives become an intrinsic part of the planning and implementation process.

Governments must recognize social protections, public services and infrastructure as the means to advance women's and girls' rights to self-actualization and the resulting gender equality as an accelerator of economic growth. This reconceptualization requires that country governments, global governance and the private sector refrain from the perception of social protections as symbolic gestures and the government to discontinue its "laissez-faire" attitude towards the planning, oversight and upkeep of infrastructure. Governments and global governance must see them as priorities that need to be adequately funded by national budgets.

Governments must, in collaboration with women's groups and non-governmental organisations, develop a long-term strategy for the provision of social protections, public services and infrastructure that has the superordinate goals of making women and girls self-reliant, independent of government support and full partners contributing to the economy, participating in the accomplishment of Sustainable Development Goals and equal beneficiaries of all positive outcomes of these goals.

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Statement submitted by Equality Now, Feminist Majority Foundation, Girls Learn International, Inc (GLI), Human Rights Watch, Let's Breakthrough Inc., National Organization for Women (NOW), Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association, Salvation Army, The Unchained At Last Inc, Women's Federation for World Peace International, and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

Child marriage is a significant, widespread problem in the United States, a human-rights abuse that primarily affects girls, with devastating consequences. In its foreign policy, the United States. considers marriage before 18 to be a human-rights abuse and pushes to stop it and to protect those affected by it. However, in its domestic policy, the United States has failed to take simple, basic steps to end child marriage or to create social protection systems for child-marriage survivors.

The minimum marriage age in most of the United States is 18, but exceptions in 48 of 50 states allow those younger than 18 to marry. Laws in 18 states do not specify any minimum age for marriage.

Typical exceptions to the minimum marriage age in United States are parental "consent" and judicial approval. However, both of those exceptions are exceptionally dangerous to children.

When a child in the United States is forced to wed, the perpetrators are very often her/his parents or guardians. Thus, parental "consent" — which typically involves nothing more than parents' signatures on a marriage license application — often is actually parental "coercion."

When a child is forced marry, that child is often forced to lie to the judge about it. Thus, the judicial-review process puts children in a horrific conundrum, forced to choose between telling the court about their plight and facing terrifying repercussions from their parents, or lying to the court and forever feeling somehow complicit in their own forced marriage and the rape and abuse that go along with it.

Laws in eight states in the United States, allow a pregnancy exception to the minimum marriage age. Such exceptions have been used to cover up rape and to force girls to marry their rapist, as happened to Sherry Johnson of Florida, who was forced at age 11 to marry the 20-year-old member of her church who had raped and impregnated her.

Further, research in the United States shows teenage mothers who marry are likely to divorce and then more likely to suffer economic deprivation and instability than teenage mothers who stay single (Vivian Hamilton, The Age of Marital Capacity: Reconsidering Recognition of Adolescent Marriage, William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository, 2012). The same research showed 70 to 80 per cent of marriages before 18 ends in failure.

In the United States, marriage ages are set by each state government, not the federal government. But the federal government, too, is failing to protect girls from child marriage. Currently, the United States federal government does not set a minimum age to petition for a foreign spouse or fiancé(e). Some girls in the United States as young as 15 have been forced to marry adult men overseas and then forced to petition for their new fiancé or husband.

Child marriage has catastrophic, long-lasting effects on a girl, undermining her health, education and economic opportunities while increasing her risk of experiencing violence. Consider:

- Children are nearly powerless to protect themselves from forced marriage. Before they become legal adults — which, in most U.S. states, happens at age 18 — children can easily be forced into marriage or forced to stay in a marriage. They face overwhelming legall and practical barriers if they try to leave home, access a shelter, retain an attorney or bring a legal action. Indeed, in many United States states, children are allowed to marry but not allowed to file for divorce in their own name.

- Women in the United States who married at 18 or younger face a 23 percent higher risk of heart diabetes, cancer and stroke than do women who married between ages 19 and 25 (Matthew Dupre, Sarah Meadows, Disaggregating the Effects of Marital Trajectories on Health, Journal of Family Issues, 1 May 2007). Women who married before 18 also are at increased risk of developing various psychiatric disorders (Yann Le Strat, Caroline Dubertret, Bernard Le Foll, Child Marriage in the United States and Its Association with Mental Health in Women, Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 24 August 2011).

- American girls and women who marry before 19 are 50 percent more likely than their unmarried peers to drop out of high school, and four times less likely to graduate from college (Gordon Dahl, Early Teen Marriage and Future Poverty, The National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2005).

- A girl in the United States who marries young is 31 percent more likely to live in poverty when she is older (ibid.).

- Globally, women who married before 18 are three times more likely to have been beaten by their spouses than women who married at 21 or older (World Policy Analysis Center, Fact Sheet, March 2015).

Due to the lax laws and lack of social protections, between 2000 and 2010, an estimated 248,000 children, some as young as 12, were married in the United States. A large majority of them were girls wed to adult men.

The United States can easily solve this problem. The federal government can set 18 as the minimum age to petition for a foreign spouse, and state governments can eliminate the exceptions that allow marriage before 18. However, the federal government has not yet acted. And, while two states in the United States recently passed bills eliminating marriage before 18, many state legislators in the United States remain resistant to ending child marriage. In state after state, legislation has been defeated or, in some cases, passed only after legislators added exceptions that still allow for child marriage.

Additionally, the United States still refuses to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, both which acknowledge the dangers of child marriage.

So this human-rights abuse remains legal in the United States and continues to disproportionately impact girls, with devastating consequences.

Meanwhile, the United States State Department has pressed other countries to stop child marriage. The State Department in 2016 identified ending child marriage abroad as a key strategy toward empowering adolescent girls and declared child marriage a "human rights abuse" that "produces devastating repercussions for a girl's life, effectively ending her childhood" by forcing her "into adulthood and motherhood before she is physically and mentally mature." The United States government allocates approximately USD11 million per year toward addressing child marriage overseas — both ending the practice and helping survivors — while failing to address the same problem at home.

We, the undersigned, call on the international community to send a strong message to the United States, as the United States has sent to the international community: It's time to create social protections and pass laws to end the human-rights abuse that is child marriage. Everywhere.

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Statement submitted by African Women's Development & Communication Network (FEMNET) and Association for Women's Rights in Development, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Please recycle

Statement

Twenty-six years of review of the Beijing Platform for Action have not been enough to ensure governments around the world guarantee access to public services, including social protection, to all women and girls. Contrary to longstanding demands from civil society, economic -and thus social- policies globally continue to be guided primarily by corporate interests in detriment of human rights and gender justice.

In this submission, the Association for Women's Rights in Development wishes to highlight its deep concern for the ongoing privatization and corporate capture of social protection in particular and social policy in general, that is undermining human rights at an unprecedented scale.

Privatization of Public Services

Neoliberal economic policies promoted around the globe by a growing majority of governments with the support and pressure of international financial institutions (including through conditional loans), have intensified the commodification of life through privatization of basic public services and natural resources.

Privatization creates an immediate financial barrier to accessing essential healthcare services in the global South and North. For women living in poverty, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer or intersex persons, people living with HIV and AIDS, people using drugs, sex workers, people of colour, migrant workers, people of specific ethnicity and/or religion and other oppressed peoples, rising private health care costs are prohibitive leading to a violation of their sexual and reproductive rights and right to health.

Women end up shouldering the rollback of public healthcare services, as people delay treatment or stay at home to be cared for primarily by women and girls. Women end up working longer hours overall in paid work, unpaid work and domestic work, violating their rights to leisure, right to health, and to participate in political processes and organizing.

Similarly, in the education sector, the increasing rate of privatization disregards the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity in education. As was duly noted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, girls from low-income backgrounds are less likely to attend schools than boys if education is privatized because of deeply entrenched gender norms.

As a result of violations of the rights to health and education, women heads of households — and particularly those in low-income sectors — often end up in deep indebtedness as they resort to private loans at high interest rates to cover privatised health or education expenses, which in turn renders them more financially vulnerable.

In every corner where water has been privatized, women and girls in impoverished households are forced to travel longer distances to find free sources of water. The high cost of water and electricity not only make household chores more difficult but can compromise women's economic activity if they are home based workers or smallholder farmers. Health risks associated with poor quality water tend to increase women's unpaid care burden as they shoulder the care of the sick and elderly when private care facilities are impossible to afford.

In addition, the effects of privatization of public services impacts women's labour force in disproportionate ways. Women are overrepresented in the lowest tier of public sector workers, such as teachers, nurses and healthcare workers and are thus likely to absorb more precarious working arrangements including lower wages, longer working hours and fewer social security benefits, if any.

Public Private Partnership contracts are usually negotiated in secret and do not go through the rigour of public participation to test if they are cost efficient and accountable. We caution against the use -and abuse- of public-private partnerships as a silver-bullet for public services financing, as there is scant regard for accountability mechanisms to uphold human rights standards, including environmental and social safeguards. The prioritisation of Public Private Partnership projects is structurally guided by profit-driven considerations rather than actual social needs. Many a time, public services and goods that mostly have an impact on women and girls (such as maternal care) are the least profitable and as a result, priority is put on mega infrastructure projects like tolled mega highways.

The ability to mobilize and organize to demand decent work and labour rights is also affected by privatization of public services as workers in similar jobs face difficulties to unionize due to different contract arrangements in the private and public sectors.

Access to Social Protection

Social protection is a human right and a key to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, yet, according to a report from the International Labour Organization in 2017, the majority of the world's population (55 per cent) is not yet covered under any type of social protection scheme, and only less than 30 per cent enjoy comprehensive coverage.

Women are particularly disadvantaged, experiencing lower coverage rates and substantially lower benefits because of prevailing inequality, discrimination and exploitation of their labour, both paid and unpaid. In fact, most of the world's social protection systems penalise women, as they are disproportionately represented in the informal sector jobs, spend the bulk of their time doing unpaid care work, suffer from different forms of violence, lack access to and control over resources, suffer from occupational segregation, and earn less than men for work of equal value. As a result, women are often excluded from contribution-based schemes and left completely unprotected in the absence of universal social protection floors. The outcome is only more poverty, more inequality, and more gender injustice.

Structural Causes

Privatisation of basic services and lack of universal social security coverage must be seen within a larger context of increasing dominance of the corporate sector and international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, on local and global public policy.

For instance, fiscal space for extending social protection systems is effectively undermined by the International Monetary Fund's push for short sighted austerity policies, and social protection schemes targeting only 'the extreme poor', thus leaving other marginalised groups without adequate coverage. As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights duly noted in his report released June 2018, there is increasing evidence that the approach to targeting often fails to reach the poorest, and that benefits often end up being given to those who are relatively well-off.

Austerity policies undermine efforts to achieve universal social protection — as spelled out in the International Labour Organization's Recommendation 202 and Sustainable Development Goal 1.3. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, just 0.3 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product would be enough to provide social protection floors for the entire world population, while currently some 10 per cent of the world's Gross Domestic Product is held in tax havens.

State's obligations to mobilize the maximum available resources to fulfil human rights -including the right to social protection, and access to basic public services for all- demands a structural transformation of the global financial architecture well beyond aid. Special attention must be paid to illicit financial flows that continue to drain public reserves particularly in developing countries and translate into fewer national resources available to improve access to key areas such as education, healthcare, or social protection with a disproportionate gender impact.

Funding for public services and social protection through national tax revenue is becoming increasingly difficult in a context marked by extreme tax competition to attract corporate and foreign direct investment. This is having a negative impact on government budgets needed to fund key areas such as health, education, public jobs, or care services.

We demand a gender and tax justice approach to fiscal policies be put in place by governments if the Beijing Platform is to be achieved. Challenging the lack of regulation of the growing financial economy that allows big companies and rich individuals to pay minimal or no tax where they operate is essential to addressing social inequality and human rights. Tax revenue must be collected in a fair manner and distributed in an equitable way.

Accountability and Justice

The capture of social public policies by corporate power and its profit-driven logics, calls into question the State's role as the primary duty bearer to respect, protect and fulfil women's human rights and uphold its social contract with citizens. Lack of accountability of corporate actors for human rights abuses — including land-grabbing, forced displacement, environmental pollution and contribution to the aggravation of climate change- often in collaboration with states, is creating massive social insecurity with gender-specific effects.

This goes hand in hand with a shrinking of democratic political space -often with violent backlash towards women human rights defenders who challenge economic models that maintain and deepen inequalities- and under-resourcing of social justice movements, including feminist, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer or intersex movements.

For indigenous and peasant women human rights defenders, as well as women labour rights defenders, physical, sexual and verbal abuse and harassment are used by the state and transnational corporations to silence narratives that challenge dominant economic development policies. We ask governments to protect women human rights defenders - particularly those who demand social protection and quality public services- from all sorts of violence perpetrated by corporations, states and/or militarised groups, or all of them combined.

We urge governments, particularly from the North where transnational corporations are often headquartered, to take bold steps towards ensuring corporate accountability and justice for human rights violations beyond voluntary principles. In this regard, we denounce the deliberate obstructions and/or lack of constructive engagement by some governments, primarily but not exclusively from the Global North, to the process within the Human Rights Council to create a legally binding instrument to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises in international human rights law.

Conclusion

Human right instruments and mechanisms, like the Beijing platform for Action, should be the basis for challenging the current narrow focus on efficiency and growth that has only taken us to the dismantling of social protection floors.

The time for change is now. States must uphold their human rights obligations to ensure public, affordable and good quality services through tax justice and public funding. Policies must be informed by the increasing body of evidence against privatization and corporate capture of social policy at the national and global levels. States must ensure accountability and justice and hold corporate actors and international financial institutions responsible for human rights abuses. It is essential to stop the imposition of austerity policies while refusing to regulate financial markets that privilege the wealthy and deprive developing countries of needed resources to fund public services. The world cannot afford twenty more years for governments to live up to their promises. we demand change now. We demand a feminist reality.

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Statement submitted by ACT Alliance — Action by Churches Together, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organisations working for decades in humanitarian response and human rights-based development in over 130 countries, we affirm that all persons are created in God's image and call for an end to gender inequality and injustice. We are committed to respecting and protecting the dignity, uniqueness, intrinsic worth, and human rights of every woman, man, girl and boy. It is our conviction that no person should be excluded, and we strongly oppose any discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious belief, class, age, ability, cultural practice or political opinion.

God's world was meant to be one of abundance with fundamental human rights and dignity for all; however, we know that women and girls are disproportionately denied this abundance. As global faith-based alliances and networks, we are committed to bridging the gender gap and to actively addressing unequal power relationships, be they social (including religious), economic or political in nature for the promotion of human dignity for all. We therefore affirm the promotion of gender equality and justice from both a theological and human rights perspective.

The Role of Faith in Ensuring Social Protection

We welcome the Commission's review of social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure and affirm their critical role in achieving Agenda 2030 and gender justice. As people of faith, we are deeply concerned by the growing inequalities and the impact on the lives of people everywhere. We acknowledge that equal rights to social protection for women and girls remains unfulfilled, and the specific underlying causes of women's vulnerability and exclusion must be addressed in order to obtain gender justice for all.

Churches and faith-based organisations have historically been, and continue to remain, at the forefront of providing social services and support to those living in the socio-economic margins. We therefore believe we have a critical role to play in actively working for just societies and advocating for social protection for all. As such, we continue to call for the recognition of our work and the resources of faith and hope that are critical for informing the direction of this ongoing work. From our Christian values, we add our voices to movements of people from all over the world who will be calling for redistribution of wealth and social protection as a matter of justice and human rights.

Civil society, including the faith-based community, plays an important role in challenging attitudes, norms and traditions that contribute to undermining women's rights and dignity. The wounds of women are most often caused by human inability to overcome the social and institutional structures which fail to address unequal power relations and diminish women and girls' God-given dignity.

Theologically, social development is to work for a just society for all, and we must continue to call for action in order to curb evil in the form of marginalisation, stigmatisation, exclusion and oppression (poverty and inequality) in order for societies to truly embody mercy and love.

Women as well as men are created in the image of God and deserve to be respected, protected and cared for. In forums such as the Commission on the Status of Women, it is necessary for member states to agree upon and protect strong international frameworks, as suggested in the "Sigtuna Statement on Theology, Tax and Social Protection (2017)" produced by members in our collective network.

We maintain that the contributions and empowerment of women and girls of all ages are fundamental, enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action, upheld in the

Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and international laws, and necessary to meet all the Sustainable Development Goals.

A Vision for Life in Abundance

As communions, networks of churches and humanitarian organisations, we have been working to build equitable and sustainable societies in all regions of the world since the founding of our organisations more than 70 years ago. In our understanding of God's grace and covenant, we have a powerful vision of what just society is: life in abundance for all that includes mutual respect, sharing of resources, and fully honouring human dignity.

This vision has become our vocation. Our local to global rights-based approach is reflected in our churches' and members' dedication to humanitarian and social and economic development work. As an example, the Lutheran World Federation has been implementing rights-based programs in Angola, Mozambique, Chad, Colombia, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Nepal, amongst others, focusing on women's rights to nutrition, healthcare, land, access to clean water, environmental protection, and other social protection systems. In countries like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, the defence of the rights of women and girl refugees and the internally displaced, including providing them with assistance and protection, has also been an ongoing concern we have sought to address. Within all of our programmatic and development work, we acknowledge the importance of social protection systems as a critical piece to ensure just and sustainable societies for all.

Call to Action

As we continue our work in pioneering social services and support for those left behind, we also mobilise the prophetic voice of the church to inspire, influence, and mobilise people of faith and broader civil society to transform attitudes and behaviours in all sectors of society.

In a statement prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the World Council of Churches said:

"It has been painful for us to acknowledge that institutions which should stand in solidarity with women, including governments and the churches, have not often responded with resolute action. We encounter, through our contact with women at the periphery of all our societies the struggle for dignity and livelihood that women engage in every day. We believe that empowerment is not possible as long as women live in contexts of violence, often exacerbated by cultural and religious tradition."

We draw the attention to the liberating power of religions and we affirm the positive and supportive role that the churches and other religious institutions can play in standing in solidarity with women and others who are marginalised. We employ the distinct resources of religion (scripture, religious practices, and organisational resources), in order to develop contextual Bible studies, advocacy tools, and theological justification for a just society and social protection for all.

We affirm publicly funded social protection as a moral imperative and assurance of every person's God-given dignity, particularly for those that have been rendered invisible by current economic and development realities, especially women and girls. We believe that social protection is an essential requirement for a just society, regardless of nationality, legal citizenship, or the level of economic development in a country.

Recommendations

Affirming the primary responsibility of the state to guarantee social protection for all, and based on our experiences as faith-based networks and institutions, we call upon Member States to:

- Work in partnership with faith-based organisations and churches, learning from their experiences in mobilising the role of faith as a positive force to promote change in society, particularly drawing on our existing sustainable structures and long-standing experience at the forefront of social service provision.
- Incorporate analysis of religious and customary systems in policymaking, and engage collaboratively with faith actors and women, girls, men and boys, to address harmful and discriminatory norms and practices that hinder progress in guaranteeing full social protection.
- Recognise the positive role that faith, and communities of faith, are playing in the provision of social services, humanitarian response, building resilient communities, promoting well-being, transforming social norms, and achieving gender equality.
- Fully implement existing human rights agreements and international commitments on social protection such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and ILO Recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors, with no regression or exception.
- Sufficiently finance the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5, and ensure the sustainability of women's rights organisations, including faith-based women's organisations, prioritizing local ownership.
- Promote gender equality and equitable redistribution of resources through the use of progressive direct taxation, social protection and gender-budgeting in national fiscal policy and domestic resource mobilisation to uphold the international responsibility and theological imperative to leave no one behind.

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Please recycle

Statement

As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organisations working for decades in humanitarian response and human rights-based development in over 130 countries, we call for an end to gender inequality and injustice, perpetuated in part by lack of inclusive social protection. We welcome the Commission's acknowledgment that the specific challenges women and girls face while living without access to comprehensive social protection systems must be addressed in order to obtain gender justice for all. These challenges must be particularly addressed in line with the international human rights framework, the ILO recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors and Agenda 2030 to ensure that 'no one is left behind'.

As Christian faith-based organisations, we are called to work for the common good and just societies, which includes the human right to basic provisions essential for life, and recognise that social protection and the fair sharing of resources are necessary for this. In accordance with the Sigtuna Statement on Theology, Tax and Social Protection (2017), produced by members in our collective network, we understand social protection as every person's human right to social security over the life cycle, provided by a system that includes for instance child grants, parental leave, unemployment benefits and old-age pensions, as well as access to affordable and high quality social services, such as education, healthcare, child, elderly and other social care and protection against gender based violence. We also note that women and girls, especially during childhood and old age, are the most deeply affected by the lack of access to social protection systems. Their over-representation in the care economy, and as the most vulnerable segment of the informal sector, often bar them from benefiting from systems that are linked to the formal labour market. We affirm publicly funded social protection as a moral imperative and as a human right for all, and particularly for those who have been rendered invisible by the current economic and development realities.

Lack of Social Protection in the Informal Sector and Care Economy

The informal sector is composed of two billion workers, of which women constitute 740 million. This sector fails to provide women with labour regulations or social protection benefits like pension, health insurance, or paid parental and/or sick leave. Women in the informal sector also often work for lower wages and in unsafe conditions, with the risk of physical, mental, and sometimes sexual abuse. According to UN-Women's Progress Report, fewer women than men receive pensions globally (due to their involvement in the informal sector) which results in more women than men living in poverty.

Faith-based actors acknowledge and emphasise that sustainable social protection systems must be financed by the states through taxation or other public revenues, even while recognising immediate needs for social protection where state responsibility is lacking. In settings where these systems are particularly deficient, churches and faith-based organisations have been supplementing governmental insufficiencies. For example, the Lutheran World Federation in Mauritania links women with customised health insurance schemes, which allow them to access otherwise unavailable medical services.

Women and girls are the most predominant actors in the care economy. Due to an increasing demand for childcare and care for the elderly, and the lack of access to adequate publicly funded care services, women and girls are most commonly tasked with covering these absences. Although this creates jobs in the care economy, they

are mostly informal positions without benefits and protections, provide low or no-wages, and expose women and girls to physical, mental, and sometimes sexual harm. According to the ILO 2018 report, women perform 76 per cent of the total hours provided in unpaid care work, which prevents them from gaining education and formal employment. Therefore, these women and girls often have no or only partial access to social protection systems.

Working with Faith Actors to promote Universal Social Protection

As churches and faith-based organisations, we have historically been on the forefront of providing sustainable social services and support to those living in the socio-economic margins, even in areas where governments have difficulty in ensuring an institutional presence. Faith communities, institutions and leaders challenge corrupt and unfair practices by promoting women's participation at all levels of society, as well as their right to be covered under social protection systems. For example, Lutheran World Service India Trust sensitises both women and men to address gender discriminatory practices that prevail in the society, and to bring change in stereotyped gender roles and gender division of labour. Lutheran World Service India Trust facilitates meetings between local government authorities and citizens, primarily women living in poverty, where they disseminate information on their right to existing public food and social security schemes and how to access these benefits.

Achieving Social Protection through Taxation

We note with deep concern that inequalities have risen sharply in the past 25 years, leaving 1.2 billion people living in multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2018). In this period, the richest 1 per cent have gained more income than the bottom 50 per cent put together. It is our firm conviction that global leaders need to move away from the belief that economic growth alone will end poverty, and address state's accountability in tax collection and tax justice, and a fair distribution thereof as an imperative for financing social protection structures for all citizens, especially women and girls. Currently, 71 per cent of the global population are lacking coverage by comprehensive social protection systems (ILO, 2018).

As faith actors, we advocate for the responsibility of the state to guarantee social protection for all through taxation and other public revenues. Taxation is a fundamental instrument for redistribution of wealth and for financing social protection systems. Governments and the private sector should be transparent about the collection, payment, and use of taxes. Corporations and wealthy individuals have a particular responsibility to financing the common good so that all can have life in dignity, and should abstain from evading taxes, engaging in capital flight, or in illicit capital flows. It is the responsibility of the state to use taxation to provide social protection for all inhabitants, including women and girls.

For example, the Christian Council of Tanzania advocates for policy reforms so that the government will guarantee a percentage of revenues from extractive industries, value-added taxes, and 'sin' taxes on alcohol and gambling, to ensure that the poorest Tanzanians are covered by health insurance as a matter of social protection. Christian Council of Tanzania also mobilises local communities through economic self-help groups and enables them to join existing health insurance schemes.

Recommendations

Based on our experiences as faith-based networks and institutions, our recommendations to Member States are as follows:

- Implement the ILO Recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors (2012) and provide basic income security and access to health care for all people, as a first step towards comprehensive and universal social protection systems.
- Ensure that systems of social protection are anchored in law and long-term political agreements and comply with international human rights standards and are designed in a way that minimises the risk of stigma, arbitrariness and corruption and that promotes transparency and access to legal recourse and complaints mechanisms at all levels.
- Prioritise spending for social protection floors in the budget, as an imperative of human rights.
- Engage with different actors in society in a political dialogue on social protection — including faith based-and other civil society actors — for the progressive realisation of comprehensive social protection systems, without compromising the duty of the state to fulfil all people's right to social protection.
- Mobilise resources for publicly funded social protection through progressive and fair taxation of the private sector and ensure maximum financial transparency to the public.
- Ensure accountability, efficiency and inclusivity in the delivery of social protection programmes.
- Guarantee gender-specific analysis and design of social protection systems beyond the narrow focus on maternity and overcoming the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, by prioritising the voice of women and girls in the designing social protection systems.
- Incorporate the international human rights instruments into the individual State Legislations to ensure equity and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups like women in the informal sector including enactment/review labour laws e.g. the minimum wage, paid parental leave.

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Statement submitted by Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of the Mission, International Association of Charities, International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Sisters of Charity Federation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Please recycle

Statement

As the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women considers "social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls", the undersigned organizations with special Economic and Social Council status wish to bring to the attention of this Commission the critical need to address the multifaceted problem of housing exclusion and street homelessness of women and girls. This issue is pivotal in dealing with social protections, in advancing toward the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and has specific gender concerns which must be addressed.

We urge the Commission to focus on unsheltered homelessness and access to adequate housing in its discussion of social protection policies by:

Calling upon Member States to provide adequate shelter to all persons regardless of gender, age, disability, legal, institutional, or socio-economic status that is safe, secure, and accessible; and to measure and monitor the extent of homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness among women;

Urging regional and global stakeholders to promote efforts to assess progress toward ending homelessness in a way that is meaningful and consistent across all countries, including support of practices of enumerating the homeless population, particularly the unsheltered population, with gender disaggregated data to provide a benchmark from which Member States can mark progress toward the progressive right to housing.

Unsheltered homelessness affects all groupings — men and women, families with children, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities. It occurs in most nations — wealthy and poor — across the globe. It has severe negative impacts on both individuals and on cities, and particularly on women.

Each of the Economic and Social Council non-governmental organisation who collaboratively developed this statement work internationally to serve and advocate for people who are economically poor and frail. A few examples of the work of the International Association of Charities highlights some of the concerns of women experiencing homelessness.

In Madagascar', "A roof first" project in Manakara, began in 2007, and serves homeless women, often single mothers with children, who are widowed or who have been abandoned by their husbands, and who are found sleeping on the streets. These women are excluded from homes because of discriminatory laws and particularly inheritance laws that provide that the marital household becomes the property of the husband's family on his death, rather than his spouse.

In La Chacarita, Paraguay, a project helps women to finish primary education and learn trades such as cooking and sewing, so they can make and sell cloth bags for bread. But these women are affected by flooding and other environmental factors in the area that are gaining in intensity. Governments need to help get residents relocated to a safe area, so they can pursue their education and livelihood.

For 14 years, in Antibes France, a group has been running a shelter with five studio apartments providing temporary accommodation for women who are victims of domestic violence. The aim is that at the end of their stay they can find themselves salaried work and a home of their own. However, the demand cannot meet the need and often cannot provide for women with more than one child.

In Turin, Italy, several groups have projects working with homeless women or women at risk of homelessness who are recent migrants to the area. Women and

especially young girls are at risk of trafficking if they wander the streets and lack safe and secure housing and access to language skills and the means to earn a living.

In addition, throughout the world, there are many examples of collaboration between the Daughters of Charity, the Sisters of Charity and the International Association of Charities who work to provide housing for elderly women who are abandoned by their families. The needs of elderly women far exceed the resources needed to adequately house them. Elderly women comprise one of the fastest growing demographics of unsheltered homeless.

As we reviewed the past decade of priority themes and advance quickly toward the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for action, we note that there has been little emphasis on the issue of homeless women. Yet we know that this issue is foundational to achieving an adequate standard of living and basic human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (GA 1948), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (GA 1966), as well as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1979). These documents all recognize the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, as well as access to education and health care.

Several United Nations agreements already acknowledge the key role of housing and shelter.

- Sustainable Development Goal 11, indicator 11.1: "By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums."
- The 2016 New Urban Agenda: "We will take positive measures to improve the living conditions of homeless people with a view of facilitating their full participation in society and to prevent and eliminate homelessness."
- The 1996 Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements: "... everyone will have adequate shelter that is healthy, safe, secure, accessible and affordable and that includes basic services, facilities and amenities."

Despite clear recognition that housing and shelter are central to meeting human potential, the Commission on the Status of Women has not focused on this important issue highlighting the specific needs of women and girls. A discussion in this session concerning social protections would play a key role in remedying this to ensure no one is left behind as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development moves forward.

Adequate housing is a core component of social protection. Social protection floors are designed to protect individuals and countries from shocks and other stresses by providing an adequate, basic standard of living to vulnerable populations. In addition to ensuring a basic income and access to healthcare, housing must be considered as a key component of ensuring individuals have a basic standard of living. According to "Social Protection: A Coherent Strategy for Shared Prosperity," the CSocD56 Civil Society Declaration, "it is patently clear that people cannot make meaningful contributions to societal development if they are ... fighting simply for basic survival." People experiencing street homelessness in every corner of the globe face negative outcomes related to mortality, health, ability to earn a basic income and other basic elements of survival. Homelessness is debilitating and often lethal for women.

In conclusion, we urge member states and this Commission to take steps to remedy the exclusion of street homelessness of women in this debate by situating the issue within the conversation around social protection floors and exploring the challenges street homelessness poses to women and to meeting the objectives of the 2030 Agenda's call for gender equality and empowerment for women and girls and

an end to poverty. We call for a clear, global measurement of street homelessness; a shared goal to reduce and ultimately end street homelessness; and support for a global movement to spread effective strategies across member states.

Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul

Congregation of the Mission

International Association of Charities

International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul

Sisters of Charity Federation

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Statement submitted by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Graduate Women International (GWI), Salvation Army, The Tandem Project, The Universal Peace Federation, Women's Federation for World Peace International, and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Please recycle

Statement

Women's Federation for World Peace, International 63rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63)

Women's Federation for World Peace International, and the undersigned international and national non-governamental organizations in general and special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, commend the priority theme of the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Gender equality depends heavily on useful and efficient systems put in place internationally, nationally and at the grassroots level to enable the empowerment of all citizens. When social protections are not in place, it is the women and girls specifically who are inordinately affected by the absence of such infrastructure.

Access to public services and sustainable infrastructure are vital for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It is reported that the Millennium Development Goals have had success in the areas of reducing extreme poverty, accessibility to safe drinking water and improving access to education. Less progress has been made in reducing hunger and maternal mortality, as well as in improving access to sanitation.

In order to provide these necessary tools to each woman, regardless of age, race, religion, geographic location, in addition to other variables, efforts must be made to bring these services to the grassroots level. Adequate food, health care and access to proper sanitation are vital components to the health and well-being of women and girls at the most basic level. The absence of healthcare and proper sanitation directly impacts the success of a girl at school and in life. Lack of proper sanitary supplies, as well as adequate toilets, impacts the education of girls and can be a major cause for them to leave school. Lack of healthcare education, including the availability of appropriate guidance regarding healthy decision making about sex and relationships as well as the availability of sanitary products, can catapult girls into precarious situations of unwelcome pregnancies, poverty, abuse, illness, and even death.

Directly related is the necessity for adequate social protection to be in place for the sustainability and security of the smallest component of society; the family. In the preamble for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the family is considered the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children. Therefore, it should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

The May 2018 report of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund summarizes that six of the Sustainable Development Goals: poverty; health; education; gender equality; youth unemployment; and ending violence can be positively impacted by well-designed family-focused policies. The family, as the elementary social unit, will inevitably influence the progress of the societies in which they are part.

In addition, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime found, through the Strengthening Families Programme introduced in Central America and the Caribbean, scientific evidence proving the effectiveness of targeting and adolescents to prevent drug abuse, crime and other high-risk behaviours in youth. This programme was

initiated in Panama in low and middle-class families. It contributes to the ongoing effort in the fields of drug prevention, HIV/AIDS, and crime amongst the juvenile population through the participation of the family as a fundamental unit in prevention. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund report also agrees that the family should not be underestimated in its role as an enabling agent in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is within a safe family environment that a child receives the physical and emotional nurturing necessary to withstand the challenging events of life. This smallest component of every society is where a bulk of unpaid domestic work is performed, as well as the support and care of children, the disabled and the elderly. It is up to the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, as well as civil society, to ensure a satisfactory infrastructure is in place in all countries to support the future's most precious asset.

Women face difficult or dangerous situations worldwide and are often unable to see beyond the daily survival and safety of their families and themselves. National and international programs for social protection, as well as efforts from civil society and non-governmental organizations, offer support and provide resources for women to aspire further than their immediate barriers.

In addition, young women have a vital role to play. As stated in the context of Security Council Resolution 1325, they need a place at the decision-making table to ensure that the needs of all women and girls are being addressed in policymaking. According to United Nations Women, when women are included in decisions, there is a 35 percent increase in the probability of that resolve lasting at least 15 years.

Non-governmental organizations occupy a privileged position as mediators between governments providing social protections and those that benefit from them. They provide programs fostering health, education and leadership aspirations, which guide women and girls to take responsibility for transformation in their families, communities and eventually ownership of the goals of the United Nations. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 4 April 2016, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres mentioned that the world spends much more energy and resources managing crises than preventing them. Investing resources into the family will go a long way in supporting a culture of prevention.

We the undersigned, encourage governments and those in civil society to invest funds and collaborate with non-governmental organizations on the ground to implement social protection efforts. Through strong commitment, communication, and collaboration between local governments and non-governmental organizations, the family can be valued as a lifeline for efficient and effective development. With such recognition, the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality can be realized.

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Statement submitted by International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Soroptimist International and Women for Water Partnership, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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Statement

Education

Education is a right and empowers women and girls in the context of global economic and technological changes and promotes development. Yet girls still represent the majority of out of school children, and women still represent the majority of the illiterate.

International Federation of Business and Professional Women emphasizes that education and training are essential to employment and access to labour markets. Skills for life can empower young women to be tomorrow's leaders and take forward the 2030 Agenda.

Educated, well-trained women can advocate for themselves, develop and use their leadership abilities to enhance their domestic, economic, social and professional position and overcome the stereotyping and discrimination that keep them frequently in poverty and informal jobs, unequal to men and subject to violence.

Recommendations:

- Fully implement target 4.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals: "By 2030 eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people, and children in vulnerable situations".
- Fully implement target 4.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals: "By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university", so that vocational secondary and tertiary level education, especially for women and girls, becomes a reality in a world of emerging economic competencies.
- Improve access of girls to Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics Education and encourage young women to pursue science and technology careers essential in a knowledge-based economy.
- Facilitate vocational and in-service training, ICTs and life-long learning programs to increase women's employment opportunities.
- Facilitate and acknowledge women's organizations and partner with them to bring this about.
- Support gender/sex-disaggregated data and gender sensitive information collection.
- Develop curricula to eliminate all gender-bias, particularly in Technical and Vocational Education and Training and STEM, girls remain under-represented, so as to take up the new global challenges and take forward the 2030 Agenda.

Healthcare

Access to healthcare for women and girls at all stages of life is essential to their empowerment and their ability to contribute to the advancement of society. Such access should include all aspects of care, including mental health, and be available for all women, including older women with disabilities.

According to data from World Population Prospects: the 2017 Revision, the number of people aged over 60 is expected to more than double by 2050 and triple by 2100. The older the population, the more people with disabilities.

The difference in the lifespan between men and women is substantial, as women live on average 5 per cent longer than men. As a consequence, the ratio of older women to older men is 2:1. This difference results in a higher vulnerability and a higher tendency to disability for women.

Women with disabilities constitute around 7 per cent of the world population but are mostly an invisible group in society. Because of the intersection of disability and gender, they are twice as likely to be victims of domestic violence and discrimination.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), recognized that "women and girls with disabilities are often at greater risk, both within and outside the home of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation" and emphasized "the need to incorporate a gender perspective in all efforts to promote the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities."

Despite progress in society, women with disabilities, who suffer from inherited diseases, chronic diseases (such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, osteoporosis, etc.) and post-traumatic events with para- and tetraplegia have been left behind in the struggle for equality and women's empowerment. Despite huge budgets for health care in the European Union and the United States of America, public services and institutions worldwide are currently inadequate to cover the needs and requirements of people with disabilities, so family members become their main caregivers.

Regardless of the gender of the person with disability, it is estimated that 66 per cent of caregivers are women, and these become invisible workers.

The average caregiver is a woman between 45 and 65 years of age who leaves paid employment to care for a family member with a disability. Because, worldwide, benefits paid to people with disabilities are inadequate for their care, and caregivers are not remunerated, these women may face severe financial problems of their own, unable to maintain a stable occupation or save for retirement, even losing their homes and their network of support.

This in turn sparks a series of psychological and physical problems in the caregiver, such as depression, detachment from friends and the community, neglect of their own physical condition, which results in the onset of chronic diseases.

Business and Professional Women International calls for action for adequate social protection systems to sustain women caregivers, part of a large yet invisible group of our society.

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduce Inequality, Equality for women and girls with disabilities); Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality); and the Legal Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Business and Professional Women International's goal, working with Business and Professional Women New Zealand, and Business and Professional Women Italy, is to obtain public monetary and psychological support for caregivers.

International Federation of Business and Professional Women acts for and supports the implementation of measures at national level that are able effectively to guarantee adequate support to all caregivers. The action should be coordinated with the public sector, social entities, employers' associations, and other people in the community.

Recommendations:

- Launch the International Women Caregivers' day to best promote their rights through their recognition (date to be determined).
- Act to support caregivers through social protection, healthcare, and welfare at regional and national level.
- Promote financial support to caregivers through an allowance for healthcare and financial help for home adaptations.
- Reach an agreement with insurance companies for better insurance deals for caregivers.
- Promote agreements with employers' associations to achieve better work flexibility to improve the quality of life of elderly disabled people and their caregivers and relatives.
- Recognize and value the role of caregivers and foster communication with social and care-workers through courses and programmes at city level.
- Guarantee aid measures to support the caregivers' medical competences and cope with mental stress.
- Drive governments towards the development of building plans that envisage the use of home automation and telematics when building homes for elderly and disabled people (smart houses) to support the demanding work of caregivers.

Mental Health

Globally, approximately 300 million people are affected by depression. More women are affected than men.

Globally an estimated 275 million people are affected by anxiety disorder. Around 62 per cent (170 million) are female.

Globally, an estimated 40 million people in the world are affected by bipolar disorder, with 55 per cent being female.

Worldwide about 10 per cent of pregnant women and 13 per cent of women who have just given birth are affected by a mental disorder, primarily depression. In developing countries this is even higher, i.e. 15.6 per cent during pregnancy and 19.8 per cent after childbirth.

Gender differences have been documented for psychological distress, anxiety and depression, with girls reporting significantly higher scores than boys.

Urgently needed are more information, awareness, cultural sensitivity, knowledge and access, especially for women and girls, to health care and mental health services.

Recommendations:

- Early detection and treatment.
- Promotion and prevention by stakeholders and politicians.
- Promotion and prevention in building resilience- multilevel approach for women and girls, for example, with digital media, health or social care settings, schools, or the community.

- Funding for mental health, funding for women's mental health. Currently, the global resources spent in mental health care (cf. Mental Health Atlas/WHO) including prevention and promotion, are disproportional to the costs incurred by mental ill health.
- Evidence-based analysis, studies, and systematic controls.
- Inclusion of the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!): Guidance to support country implementation-WHO 2017. This approach assists governments in responding to the health needs of adolescents in their countries, including mental health. (WHO 2018c. Adolescent mental health. Key facts).
- Inclusion of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health 2016–2030. This strategy emphasizes that every woman and girl has a right to attain physical and mental well-being and identifies adolescents as central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2015–2030.
- Adoption of Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020. WHO's Mental Health Gap Action Programme provides evidence-based technical guidance, tools and training packages to expand countries' health services and access to health services, particularly in low-resourced contexts.

Review theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session)

Access to and equal management of water and sanitation are prerequisites for women's development and empowerment. Women play a pivotal role in water management. Although this principle (3) has been part of the legacy of and policy on water since 1992 (Dublin principles), implementation needs a boost. Acknowledging women's traditional and modern roles can help unlock women's potential in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 5 and the wider 2030 Agenda. To reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets it is imperative to ensure and enhance women's professional and voluntary roles and involvement in water.

It should be emphasized that pursuant to the human right to water and sanitation, countries have an obligation to progressively provide safe drinking water and adequate sanitation services, including in the workplace. Countries also have the obligation to guarantee that the right to water is enjoyed without discrimination and equally between men and women. Meeting this obligation will remove one of the major hurdles to women having the opportunity to go to school, obtain the appropriate education and training, and hold positions in the workplace, further adding to the economies' skilled human resource capacity. Clean, safe and readily (uninterrupted) available water in medical posts, homes, schools, and other training institutions is therefore another prerequisite to a healthy economy (OECD, 2011a).

In many countries, droughts, floods and deforestation increase the risks for women and girls, compounded by lack of information, persistent cultural roles, etc. They increase unpaid time girls and women spend to retrieve water for household chores and small-scale farming e.g., leaving them less time for education or earning an income (ILO, 2013a; UNDP, 2014).

Supporting women, giving them a seat at the table to decide on policies and measures to prevent disasters, finding the right coping mechanisms, building their resilience are crucial elements to prevent death and destruction as a result of natural disasters.

Recommendations:

- Follow-up on the recommendations of the special rapporteur on the gender aspects of human rights to water and sanitation.
- Follow-up on the recommendations of the World Water Development Report 2016: measures that can be undertaken to improve women's participation in, and contribution to the water-related workforce, include: adopting equal opportunity policies and measures; improving sex-disaggregated workforce data sets; addressing cultural barriers, social norms and gender stereotypes; and expanding access to public services and investment in time- and labour-saving infrastructure.
- Acknowledge women's traditional and modern roles to unlock women's potential in achieving Sustainable Development Goals six and five combined and the wider 2030 Agenda. To reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets it is imperative to ensure and enhance women's professional and voluntary roles and involvement in water.
- Agree to a dedicated World Water Day on water and women, to help unblock this major, persistent issue.

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Statement submitted by Associated Country Women of the World, Global Fund for Widows, Gray Panthers, Guild of Service, HelpAge International, Mother's Union, National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, Shrimati Pushpa Wati Loomba Memorial Foundation, The Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited, Tandem Project, The Widows Rights International and Widows for Peace through Democracy, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

Widows the world over suffer from obscurity. They are often hidden due to traditional taboo. As a result, they are often unsupported.

Lack of statistics, disaggregated by marital status, has led to a dearth of data on widows and female headed households. The priority theme provides a timely opportunity to raise awareness of the situation of widows around the world. If Agenda 2030 aims to leave no one behind, the plight of widows has to be understood and overcome. Thus, the review theme also needs to highlight widowhood in all its forms.

It is imperative that widows are not only considered victims and survivors of the many types of abuse and disadvantage they suffer, but also as potential protagonists for positive change. Examples in Rwanda, Kenya, India, Nepal, Uganda and Tanzania attest to the positive force that widows can have within communities when their situation is understood, and they are empowered to take steps to change their lives for the good.

It is evident that women and girls, throughout their life cycle and whatever their background, are in need of access to good education, social protection and decent work. Due to harmful traditional practices and age-old attitudes to widows, this group is often the most in need and the least recognised. They need to be protected from all the ills of poverty and marginalisation including violence and all forms of deprivation.

With new conflicts ever beginning, and continuing, around the world, it is inevitable that there will be an increase in widows. Any type of turmoil leads to families attempting to safeguard their daughters, often with the miss-placed belief that marriage will protect them. With early and forced marriage, girls not only lose their childhood, but with conflict and disruption, they also face the disadvantage of widowhood.

It is imperative that The Commission on the Status of Women 63 results in Agreed Conclusions that ensure robust provision for widows in terms of social protection, pensions, social security, access to justice, in addition to being recognised as potential positive change agents.

If widows continue to be neglected, with the increase of children of widows who themselves are, generation after generation, more disadvantaged than their peers, poverty and inequality of women and girls will be exacerbated.

The children of war rape are recognised as a demographic ripe for radicalisation who feel completely disenfranchised by society. This is also the case for the children of widows. If neglected, widowhood is a root cause of poverty across the generations and impedes peace and prosperity for the whole community.

Pensions

Few middle and low-income countries (LMICs) and fragile conflict afflicted states (FACs) have a system of universal pensions and social protection providing a safety net for widows of all ages.

Literature and research on widowhood, often looking at the global north, focuses predominantly on older widows, and ignores the plight of younger bereaved women and girls.

Even in so called developed countries, older widows may be dependent on state pensions. The value of which has dropped dramatically leaving them in poverty

including that of isolation and lack of respect. With austerity, many services that might assist them such as health, recreation, home care, and so on, have been cut.

The majority of state pension systems depend on contributions from those working in the formal sector. Many women working in the informal sector are therefore ineligible in this framework. A system that takes into account the work of women in other sectors needs to be strengthened to assist widows of all ages.

The procedures for applying for state pensions often disadvantage widows, as they may depend on formal documentation, birth, marriage and death certificates that are often absent for these women. Long distances to government offices, difficulty in completing forms and challenges of communicating with strangers outside their villages deter many from seeking pensions.

In India, where there is a universal pension scheme, the provision is of sums so low that some widows, if aware of these benefits and able to access them, do not find the process worth following. In many cases, there is a need for a male relative to undertake the task to obtain the pension, which creates an opportunity for manipulation.

We urge Member States to agree to ensure robust and accessible pensions for widows.

Harmful traditional practices

Widows have inheritance and other rights in many countries. However, their lived reality is that patriarchal discrimination results in the denial of their rights to inheritance, land, property, access to justice and protection from harmful traditional practices (HTPs).

They are stigmatised and therefore exposed to multiple forms of violence. They can be forced into high-risk economic exploitation such as modern-day domestic, agricultural or sexual slaves, often coerced into begging and prostitution. Effective social protection mechanisms and services should eliminate such survival measures. It is unacceptable that prostitution can be considered appropriate work for any disadvantaged woman. Thus far social protection measures have failed to protect widows.

Young Widows

In most countries, social protection mechanisms do not provide for child or young widows. They are unable to access pensions due to age and there are often few other social protection measures in place to assist them. They are thus denied full access to education or child care and they are often left widows having to provide for children, when they themselves are still children. This results in vulnerability leading to violence and exploitation.

Work of Non-governmental Organisations

There are positive examples of non-governmental organisations assisting widows in accessing any social support, benefits or services available, by assisting with relevant documentation. For example, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has enabled widows to secure life insurance, health care, scholarships for education, legal aid, and so on. This work has seen a decline in widows begging, daughters withdrawn from school for early marriage, and in prostitution.

When widows can work together in their own organisations, it has been found to have profound effects not only on the widows themselves and their families, but the community as a whole. We therefore ask Member States to ensure robust funding for organisations for and run by widows themselves to ensure their voices are heard and heeded and their unique perspective can provide new understanding and solutions.

Data

It is evident that absence of accurate data prevents widows from accessing what social support exists. We ask Member States to ensure robust data is collected on all aspects of widowhood. When considering this issue, it is important to note the highly effective gathering of grass roots data by NGOs such as Women for Human Rights Single Women's Group in Nepal and Naserian in Tanzania.

Conclusion

If we are seeking a peaceful and prosperous world for all, it is incumbent on States Parties, United Nations Agencies and all civil society including business, academia and non-governmental organisations, to ask ourselves questions regarding the most disadvantaged in society. When we seek to raise awareness of one group, how can we ensure that we do not prioritise their rights over others? How can we ensure that we have real information about those most disadvantaged? Where does that information come from? How can we ensure that the solutions proposed do not have an unforeseen adverse consequence?

In regard to widows of all ages, backgrounds, cultures and countries, it is clear that there is need for more awareness of their situation. It is also the case that by enabling widows, often the most disadvantaged in a community, the whole community benefits. There is evidence that to find the most diverse range of accurate information, it is imperative to get this from the widows themselves. Good examples highlight that finding accurate data can be achieved by working with widows' organisations with a local base. Widows organisations provide an uplifting example of resilience from which we can all benefit.

We ask the Commission on the Status of Women 63 to ensure the concerns and requests of widows are included in the Agreed Conclusions so they too can realise their potential and play their part in creating the prosperous and peaceful world that all noble hearted people long for.